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Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)

Report of the Secretary-General

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SUMMARY

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/177 of 16 December 1996, in which the Assembly recommended actions towards implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-second session, through the Economic and Social Council, on the implementation of the resolution.

Several of the General Assembly's recommendations have been or are being implemented. The Commission on Human Settlements addressed many of them at its sixteenth session, held from 28 April to 7 May 1997, and in so doing recommended certain further actions for consideration by the Assembly at its fifty-second session. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, for its part, is pursuing recommendations relating to the development of the work programme of the Centre and the strengthening of cooperation and coordination with United Nations system agencies and other organizations outside the United Nations system, as well as with other civil society partners in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

The implementation of a number of decisions and recommendations of resolution 51/177 is predicated on actions that are still pending or are ongoing, such as those to be taken by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session and by the Economic and Social Council at its 1997 substantive session, as well as those arising from the overall reform of the organization, which is to be the subject of a report to be submitted by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly in July. The present report is therefore subject to updating when those actions have been completed.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 51/177 of 16 December 1996 on the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II),[1] the General Assembly endorsed the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Habitat Agenda adopted by the Conference at Istanbul on 14 June 1996 and called upon all Governments, organizations of the United Nations system and other actors concerned with human settlements and urban management issues to implement fully and effectively the Habitat Agenda and to give both the Habitat Agenda and the Istanbul Declaration the widest possible dissemination.

2. It further reaffirmed that all States should exert concerted efforts to achieve the implementation of the Habitat Agenda through bilateral, subregional, regional and international cooperation, as well as through the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, and that States might also convene bilateral, subregional and regional meetings and take other appropriate initiatives to contribute to the review and assessment of the progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

3. The General Assembly further recommended a number of actions towards the implementation of the conference outcomes, concerning which it requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-second session through the Economic and Social Council. The present report is in response to that request.

II. HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF AGENDA 21

4. In paragraph 14 of its resolution 51/177, the General Assembly recommended that at its special session, to be convened from 23 to 27 June 1997 for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of Agenda 21, the Assembly give due attention to the issue of human settlements in the context of sustainable development. The Commission on Human Settlements, in its resolution 16/24 of 7 May 1997 entitled "Special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21", reaffirmed that sustainable development was essential for human settlements development and expressed the conviction that urban settlements, properly planned and managed, held a promise for human development and for the protection of the world's natural resources through their ability to support large numbers of people while limiting their negative impact on the natural environment.

5. Also in resolution 16/24, the Commission called upon the General Assembly to take into account, at its special session, the Habitat Agenda and the Istanbul Declaration, because urgent action in cities and human settlements was necessary to secure sustainable human settlements and safe and healthy living conditions, especially for urban populations. That was in recognition of the impact of urbanization on all sectors of sustainable human settlements.

6. The Commission further invited all relevant specialized agencies and related organizations of the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions to strengthen and adjust their activities, programmes and

medium-term strategies within their mandates to take into account the follow-up to Habitat II, particularly at the field level. Relevant governing bodies were urged to examine their policies, programmes, budgets and activities in order to ensure that implementation of the Habitat Agenda was fully integrated in them.

7. The Commission also requested the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) (Habitat) to promote cooperation and exchange of information between the Centre and the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development in order to keep their intergovernmental machinery informed of their respective inputs in addressing the questions of sustainable development of human settlements.

8. The Commission further requested the Executive Director to submit his report on the implementation of Agenda 21 (HS/C/16/15 and Corr.1), together with the comments made on it by the Commission, to the General Assembly at its special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21.

III. REVIEW AND STRENGTHENING OF THE MANDATE OF THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

9. In paragraphs 17, 18 and 22 of its resolution 51/177, the General Assembly emphasized that both the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council should, in accordance with their respective mandates, review and strengthen the mandate of the Commission on Human Settlements, taking into account the Habitat Agenda and the need for a system-wide approach to its implementation. The Assembly also invited the Commission to review its work programme in order to ensure an effective follow-up to and implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

10. In response, the Commission on Human Settlements, at its sixteenth session (Nairobi, 28 April to 7 May 1997) adopted resolution 16/2 of 7 May 1997 entitled "Follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and the future role of the Commission on Human Settlements", in which it recommended to the General Assembly the adoption of a resolution on the framework for the functioning of the Commission, its terms of reference, the structure of its agenda and work programme, documentation, its methods of work and the functioning of its secretariat. The draft resolution is contained in the report of the Commission on the work of its sixteenth session,[2] which will be submitted to the Assembly at its fifty-second session, through the Economic and Social Council, for consideration and appropriate action.

IV. ASSESSMENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS CENTRE FOR HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

11. In paragraph 19 of its resolution 51/177, the General Assembly invited the Secretary-General to undertake, in the light of the review of the mandate of the Commission on Human Settlements, a comprehensive and in-depth assessment of the Centre with a view to its revitalization. It also invited him to present terms of reference and a preliminary report on that assessment for the consideration of the Commission at its sixteenth session and to make a final report to the

Assembly at its fifty-second session. Pursuant to that request, the Secretary-General submitted to the Commission a preliminary report (HS/C/16/5) which contained, inter alia, the proposed terms of reference of the assessment of the Centre and confirmed that the final report would be presented by the Secretary-General to the Assembly at its fifty-second session.

12. Meanwhile, a review of the programme and administrative practices of the Centre has been undertaken by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (A/51/884), which made recommendations aimed at enabling the Centre better to discharge its responsibilities. The Commission, having reviewed the activities of the Centre and having considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, adopted resolution 16/19 on corrective measures in administrative and budgetary matters and resolution 16/8 on revitalization of the Habitat Centre, in which various suggestions were made towards revitalizing and strengthening the various facets of the work of the Centre.

13. Resolution 16/8 also requested the Secretary-General to take into account, in undertaking the requested comprehensive and in-depth assessment of the Centre, certain important guiding principles, including the mandate of the Centre as contained in General Assembly resolution 32/162 of 19 December 1977, as further elaborated in paragraph 228 of the Habitat Agenda; the Centre's programme of work based on the Habitat Agenda; and the need for the promotion and support of international cooperation. A preliminary report by the Centre entitled "Revitalization action plan for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda" (HS/C/16/CRP.9), mapping out possible measures designed to enhance various aspects of the Centre's structure and functioning, was made available to the Commission at its sixteenth session.

V. NEW WORKING METHODS OF THE COMMISSION

14. In paragraph 21 of its resolution 51/177, the General Assembly requested the Commission to review, at its sixteenth session, its working methods in order to involve in its work the representatives of local authorities or international associations of local authorities and other relevant actors of civil society, taking into account the rules of procedure of the Commission and the relevant provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

15. At its sixteenth session, the Commission accordingly reviewed its working methods. Recognizing and highlighting the importance of the involvement of local authorities and civil society in the effective implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the Commission in its resolution 16/12, decided, subject to rule 61 of the rules of procedure of the Commission and the relevant provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31:

(a) To invite Governments to consider, where appropriate, including in their delegations to future sessions of the Commission, in accordance with the specific conditions of each country, representatives of local authorities and the relevant actors of civil society, particularly the private sector, non-governmental organizations and research organizations in the field of adequate shelter for all and sustainable development of human settlements;

(b) That at its future sessions, the Commission would provide opportunities for partners to engage in dialogue among themselves and with Governments. The dialogues might, as appropriate, serve as an input to the deliberations of the Commission;

(c) Invited the representatives of local authorities and the relevant actors of civil society, particularly the private sector, non-governmental organizations and research organizations in the field of adequate shelter for all and sustainable development of human settlements to propose activities for the inter-sessional periods to the Centre, for the approval of the Commission, in order to accelerate the implementation of the Habitat Agenda;

(d) Requested the Executive Director of the Centre to ensure that partners were actively involved with the Centre's work so as to contribute to the effective implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

VI. DEVELOPING THE WORK PROGRAMMES OF THE COMMISSION AND THE CENTRE

16. Pursuant to paragraph 24 of General Assembly resolution 51/177, the Commission, in its resolution 16/2, outlined its work programme. The work programme is outlined in operative paragraphs 11 to 15 of the draft resolution contained in resolution 16/2, which the Commission recommended for adoption by the General Assembly. The Commission decided that its work should be focused primarily on the relevant provisions of the Habitat Agenda, with a view to ensuring its effective implementation. It further outlined certain substantive items derived from the Habitat Agenda for its future sessions, including review of the relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the themes "Sustainable human settlements development" and "Adequate shelter for all".

17. Through that resolution, the Commission also decided to focus, at its seventeenth and eighteenth sessions, on monitoring the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and on assessing its impact. It decided to structure those sessions around the following four substantive areas of the Habitat Agenda:

(a) Adequate shelter for all, including the monitoring of the Global Shelter Strategy;

(b) Sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world, including the monitoring of chapter 7 of Agenda 21;

(c) Capacity-building and institutional development;

(d) International cooperation and coordination.

18. The Commission, in consideration of further development of its catalytic role in promoting adequate shelter for all and sustainable development of human settlements, further decided that:

(a) At its eighteenth session, in 2001, the Commission would also consider preparations for the special session of the General Assembly, if appropriate;

(b) In 1998 and 2000, the Centre would analyse the progress on national implementation status based on the four above-mentioned substantive areas, and would prepare reports to be considered by the Commission at its seventeenth and eighteenth sessions.

19. The Commission also reviewed the Human Settlements Programme, the United Nations medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 and the work programme (1998-1999) of the Centre, and set priorities for the work programme activities. It requested that in preparing future work programmes, a parallel version of the work programme organized according to the structure of the Habitat Agenda should be provided. That should give a clear indication of the linkages between the Habitat Agenda and the work programme. The Commission also urged that budget and spending be brought into line with work programme priorities, as identified by the work programme.

20. In response to paragraphs 27 and 34 of General Assembly resolution 51/177, four of the regional commissions identified and developed programmes and other actions in their respective regions towards the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. That was conveyed to the Commission at its sixteenth session in document HS/C/16/CRP.2, entitled "Draft work programmes of the regional commissions in the field of human settlements for the biennium 1998-1999".

VII. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HABITAT AGENDA

21. The Centre, in its role as focal point for human settlements activities within the United Nations system, has continued to enhance and promote cooperation and coordination with agencies and organizations within the system, including the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, among others. It is also promoting expanded cooperation and coordination with intergovernmental organizations outside the United Nations system, such as the Caribbean Community, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, the League of Arab States, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Organization of American States, the Organization of African Unity, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Company for Habitat and Housing in Africa (Shelter-Afrique), as well as with such financial institutions as the Inter-American Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the African Development Bank and non-governmental organizations, including universities and research and scientific institutes, in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. In its resolutions 16/20 and 16/21, the Commission recognized such cooperation and coordination and urged the Executive Director to continue to improve and promote such cooperation and coordination among agencies and organizations within and outside the United Nations system to ensure more effective implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

22. While the implementation of the Habitat Agenda is the primary responsibility of each country, its full and effective implementation will require mobilization of international financial and technical cooperation resources to support implementation, particularly in developing countries and especially in the least developed among them. The increasing importance in this context of private sector investments also should be noted. In paragraph 1 (d) of its resolution 16/8, the Commission directed the Centre to promote and support international cooperation, in particular through resource flows and the transfer of know-how, experience and technology. As a result of the importance attached to that issue, the Commission decided to have as one of the special themes for its seventeenth session the topic of international cooperation for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

VIII. SUPPORT TO THE UNITED NATIONS HABITAT AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS FOUNDATION

23. Pursuant to paragraphs 20 and 33 of General Assembly resolution 51/177, in which the Assembly invited all Governments and the international community to consider the role of the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and to consider the scope for providing further support for the Foundation in its activities, taking into account the need to continue to improve its effectiveness, the Commission, on 6 May 1997, conducted a pledging session for the Foundation at which 23 Governments pledged contributions. Approximately US$ 4.4 million was pledged, a significant proportion being for earmarked projects. While that was a successful event, particularly considering the amounts pledged, many countries have yet to make their pledges. Considering the vastness of the task of implementing the Habitat Agenda, countries and partners that have not yet made pledges to the Foundation are urged to do so and are encouraged further to increase the non-earmarked component of their contributions. The Commission, in its resolution 16/8, also stressed that the Centre must have adequate, stable and predictable funding for its activities, adding that resource mobilization, including the urgent need to broaden its funding base, should receive due attention.

Notes

[1] Report of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul, 3-14 June 1996 (A/CONF.165/14).

[2] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 8 (A/52/8).